

Getting Started With Customized HRT

So, you have seen it on Oprah, read and heard about it from Suzanne Somers, and your friends have started talking about it. The BUZZ is out there and Customized HRT is HOT... So what are the next steps?

First things first.

Customized hormone replacement therapy needs a prescription. You need to be under the supervision of a physician. They are the ones that direct your care, monitor hormone levels, and decide course of treatment. The [Piqua Medicine Shoppe](#) works closely with all types of MDs and nurse practitioners from family practice to OBGYNS.

Communication is extremely important. Working as a triad with you and your physician is the key to the success of Customized HRT. Our clinical pharmacist will review symptoms and make dosing recommendations, but ultimately your physician or nurse practitioner makes the determining treatment strategy.

STEP ONE: Get Educated!!!

Understand what Customized HRT is all about, why it makes sense, what you can expect, the pros and cons etc. Don't rely on your MD to have all the answers for 2 very good reasons - lack of specialized training in medical school and the sheer amount of medical information that is published yearly. Some MDs do specialize in this and stay current on latest info, but most are far too busy diagnosing and treating other disease states such as diabetes, hypertension, and elevated cholesterol. Fortunately, most are open to hormone treatment if presented in the correct manner. Partner with your MD and go on this journey together. It is often said that MDs learn as much from their patients as their patients learn from them.

A few books that I think you should read.... [Natural Hormone Balance](#) by Uzzi Reiss MD, [Are Your Hormones Making You Sick?](#) by Eldred Taylor MD and [The Wisdom of Menopause](#) by Christiane Northrup MD. I especially like Dr Reiss's book because it gives very practical advice for treatment for both patient and MD. Dr Reiss is an OBGYN in California and has been treating women for over 20 years with customized hormone therapy. The book is very readable and is packed full of great information.

STEP TWO: Begin a symptoms diary

Hormone imbalance causes a huge array of symptoms, both obvious and subtle. We need a baseline or to know where you are right now so that we can clarify and measure your success. Download a daily symptoms sheet and begin monitoring. This is enormously helpful, especially when you visit us for a consultation or your MD for examination. The more, exact information we gather, the better the treatment plan and ability to measure success. How are you on a normal day? How do you wake up? What is your stress level? How much exercise do you get? How is your diet? Headaches? Weight gain? Blood pressure? Periods? Mood changes? etc... You get it...The key... know yourself... what foods work for you... which don't.. what lifestyle changes work best?

As a side note, I would consider keeping a personal diary. Your emotional health is so critical to treatment. Emotional stress, often from unresolved relational situations, career, or family dynamics, causes a great deal of drain on the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands are the organs that neurochemically deal with stressors. When they burn out we call this Adrenal Fatigue. For more information go to Dr Wilson's website Adrenalfatigue.org or read his book called [Adrenal Fatigue](#). It is possible to strengthen the adrenal gland with supplements, but dealing with the emotional stress is key to long term improvement.

STEP THREE: Testing (Blood (serum) VS Saliva VS Urinary)

This is where we might run into a little controversy. Most MDs are familiar with blood serum testing. We measure HDL, LDL, Triglycerides, CBC's, electrolytes, etc. in serum. Most insurance companies pay for blood testing and I guarantee that you can not get a complete physical without giving a little blood. It is a standard of care and normally a real good diagnostic tool. It is possible to measure hormones in the serum and it is quite commonly done. I personally find it a bit clumsy to use for a couple of reasons: the ranges are too great, the measurements are in serum and I am more interested in hormone levels at the tissue not blood, you have to extrapolate free and total levels because hormones are tightly bound to proteins called sex hormone binding globulins (98% of hormones are bound) and it gets complicated knowing if the free hormone is active or if the SBGH complex has activity. The range in a male for testosterone is 350-1000, so a male at 352 is considered in range but is most likely experiencing a great deal of andropausal symptoms. The other major issue is that you can not accurately and meaningfully measure cortisol levels in the serum. Cortisol is a measure of stress and adrenal function. Often, treating the adrenal gland is the first step in regaining hormone balance.

My personal favorite testing involves saliva testing. We prefer ZRT labs in Oregon. (see www.salivatest.com.) Saliva or salivary testing is easy to do, doesn't require a prescription in many states, and I feel gives really meaningful information. You can get a kit free of charge by calling or emailing us. The saliva kit normally comes with 4 test tubes, a symptoms sheet, directions, and a plastic bag/UPS label. To administer the test, all you have to do is spit or drool into the test tube 4 times in one day (morning, noon, dinner, and bedtime). Allow 30 minutes for the morning drool because of dry mouth and the fact that the test tube is larger. A good sample is a tube that is a little over half full with liquid, not foam or bubbles. Fill up those 4 test tubes and UPS to ZRT labs and approximately 7-12 days later, the results get emailed to us. We then contact you to go over results. Very simple. Saliva tests measure hormones at the tissue level which is a better reflection of how they are interacting in the body. I would recommend the female and male panel respectively and include the 4 time/day measure of cortisol. I find it very valuable to see your cortisol level fluctuations during the day. Estradiol, progesterone, testosterone, and DHEA are the main hormone levels measured in saliva. (DHEAS actually which is another great measure of adrenal function) Post menopausal women and all men can do the test anytime, but I would recommend that pre and perimenopausal women perform the test during day 20-21 of their cycle to get a good progesterone measurement during the luteal phase of cycle. ZRT labs has compiled saliva profiles from thousands of patients, so

I find that their reference ranges are relatively narrow, meaningful, and often correlate well with symptoms. They also provide a detailed analysis of results based on values obtained which is extremely helpful.

I would also recommend that you combine the saliva test with a blood spot test (the combo kit). Blood spot testing is simply pricking the finger and dabbing a few drops of blood on 8 filter paper spots. The blood quickly dries and can be sent with the saliva to the lab to be tested. Blood spot is particularly useful in measuring thyroid function (TSH, T3, T4, and TPO), but it also can measure hormones, Growth hormone, IGF, and a whole host of other things. The downside of using saliva tests is that many insurances don't cover them and many MDs are not familiar with them. I would recommend that you contact your insurance company to see if they cover prior to testing. If not, I would tell you that testing is pretty affordable. A combo saliva/bloodspot test is somewhere around \$400. Because many physicians are not familiar with the testing, I would encourage you to take your results into them and let your MD look at them. I believe that they will be quite impressed with the valuable information obtained from the testing. They might even order their own tests and administer to other patients. See, now you have become a pioneer in Customized HRT and opened the doors for the next group of women to come marching in. Remember, also, saliva tests are something that you can do on your own prior to visiting your physician and it provides you with great information about your own biochemistry in action.

Urinary testing is the final type of testing I will mention. I am not terribly familiar with it but I will try to give you a rundown. Urinary testing is typically measuring metabolites in the urine (waste). Metabolites are the breakdown of hormones or other biologically active substances. For simplicity, I will only be concerned with hormonal metabolites. Estradiol, the most biologically active estrogen converts to estrone in the body. The estrone is how the body stores its estrogen. Estrone is broken down to estrone metabolites. Some of these metabolites appear harmless whereas some are implicated as being carcinogenic (cancer causing). How the body determines the percentage breakdown of these metabolites is a dynamic process that can be altered by age, diet, nutritional status, genetics and a whole host of other things. Urinary testing I believe is most valuable when you are fine tuning therapy and tweaking hormonal regimens based on the individual patient. I also see urinary testing to measure nutritional status, inflammatory status of body, neurotransmitter and amino acid levels. Most insurances pay for it for they are quite expensive. I do find them enormously worthwhile if you are looking proactively at your health and trying to uncover potential health issues before full blown disease, as well as monitoring your hormonal/nutritional/biochemical levels in maximizing your overall health.

STEPS FOUR AND FIVE ARE INTERCHANGABLE

Contact your MD for an appointment. Explain as best you can that you are interested in using Customized HRT and map out what you have done, and your goals of the appointment as well as the treatment. Try and gauge the comfort level of your MD. Hopefully you have had a great long term relationship with your MD and they will welcome this opportunity to

partner with you. Often they will refer you to someone else if they aren't comfortable. At least you know that upfront and your valuable time won't be wasted. If you don't have a physician or the referrals haven't panned out, I would recommend contacting us or another compounding pharmacy in your area for a list of MDs that they typically work with in Customized HRT. To find a local compounding pharmacy go to the Internal Academy of Compounding Pharmacies iacprx.org. Type in your zip code and they will provide a list of compounding pharmacies in your area.

You may also contact us directly for a free consult if you are in the area. We can go over your saliva results, symptoms, as well as our recommendations. Just call our local number 773-1778 (937 area code) or 1-888-723-5344. We would love to help you on your BHRT journey.

STEP SIX

Monitor your success... Continue your daily symptom diary to measure improvement and identify areas that need more tweaking. Reevaluation is the key to continued success and growth. Some symptoms improve dramatically allowing for amazing improvement in your quality of life. Other symptom improvements are more subtle. Maybe you wake up more refreshed, your energy levels seem a bit better, you get less stressed, maybe your facial complexion improves. Also, revisit saliva testing in 6 months. Look for improvements in your hormonal levels as well as opportunities to make dosage adjustments to fine tune. Testing gives us a road map to improve treatment. There might be a need to improve the adrenal gland with adrenal support nutritionals, look to see the functioning of the thyroid gland, or add/subtract nutritionals to improve the functioning of your cells and organs. It might be necessary to adjust hormone treatment to maximize success.

Bottom line... Customized HRT requires a partnership with your MD and Pharmacist with the overall goal of hormone balance so the body is functioning at its highest level as well as proactively identifying health issues and treating with diet, lifestyle, and nutritional changes before the diseases manifest themselves.